Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Dwight Chapin's Visit to the White House

Dwight L. Chapin, President Nixon's indicted former appointments secretary who faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted for perjury, recently visited at the White House — pointing up the strangely enduring relationship between the President and his fallen aides.

Ordinary citizens are barred from the White House inner sanctum, but Chapin—indicted on four counts of perjury Nov. 29—had no such trouble while in Washington for a federal court appearance. On one occasion, he was closeted with present presidential aides in a senior aide's vacant office.

One aide told us Chapin was paying a courtesy call on old acquaintances. But, coincidental or not, his visit preceded new White House propaganda against deposed White House counsel John W. Dean III. In their campaign against the credibility of the chief accuser of the President and his former aides, Mr. Nixon's present lieutenants are pointing to a confrontation in court next Friday between Dean and Chapin.

A hearing is scheduled that day on a motion by Chapin's lawyers to prevent Dean from testifying against Chapin on grounds it would violate the lawyer-client relationship. The White House has confided to newsmen that devastating cross-examination during the hearing will destroy Dean as the special prosecutor's star witness against game much bigger than Chapin.

Whether Dean is demolished or even appears as a witness next Friday remains to be seen. Beyond dispute is the conscious interrelationship of two separate proceedings: the President's defense against impeachment and the defense of his ex-aides, ranging from H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman down to Dwight Chapin, in criminal proceedings.

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Former Atty. Gen. Elliot Richardson has been promised a political turnout by the militantly conservative Mississippi Republican Party when he makes his first political foray there later this month. He decided to stick his toe in Southern political waters to test reactions in hostile country to his possible presidential candidacy.

Richardson, the Boston Brahmin who fell in last October's Saturday Night Massacre, is regarded in the South as far left, though in fact he is close to the Republican center. Nevertheless, powerful Republicans have pledged to corral a large audience for him in Biloxi Feb. 25 for a "frankly political" speech. The chief guarantor: none other than the aggressively conservative Clark Reed, Republican state chairman who heads the Southern Republican state chairmen.

Reed feels Richardson, as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), plotted a subtle course for school integration which reversed headlong desegregation and helped make President Nixon a hero throughout the South.

Richardson originally accepted a nonpolitical date at the University of Mississippi Feb. 24 and then asked Reed to help arrange a political speech.

A footnote: Mr. Nixon's animus against Richardson for refusing to help purge Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox continues unabated. In his list of 1976 presidential prospects last week, the President conspicuously ignored the suave Bostonian whom he named Under Secretary of State, Secretary of HEW, Secretary of Defense and Attorney General.

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Two Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee, now beginning impeachment proceedings, reacted in opposite ways to the President's invitation to breakfast last Wednesday.

The Chowder and Marching Society, an exclusive in-group of Republican House members, was invited by charter member Nixon to hold its weekly breakfast meeting in the White House. Two members of the society, Reps. Thomas Railsback of Illinois and Trent Lott of Mississippi, are also members of the House Judiciary Committee.

Railsback debated with himself, then decided not to attend, in keeping with informal agreement by committee Republicans to stay at arm's length from the White House during impeachment proceedings. But freshman congressman Lott decided to go.

"I don't think we should ostracize ourselves from every White House function," Lott told us, adding that impeachment was scarcely mentioned during breakfost. But considering that White House campaign suggesting that Judiciary Committee Democrats on record for impeachment should disqualify themselves as "jurors," the question of entertaining "jurors" over fried eggs becomes relevant. On the day of the breakfast, Lott was one of 70 House members who voted unsuccessfully to set a White House-desired April 30 deadline on the committee's proceedings.

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